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ABSTRACT

Scientists estimate that 95% of children can be taught to read. Recent studies have made it possible to understand how literacy develops and why some children have difficulty learning to read. The primary purpose of this literature review is to examine reading teaching models and their application in an effective reading/early intervention program. The secondary purpose is to determine the characteristics of an effective early intervention program. In addition, this paper discusses the goals of an effective reading program; examines the different teaching models and the research on their effectiveness; and presents the instructional strategies and traits of an effective early intervention program. (Contains 46 references.) (Author/PM)

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An Effective Intervention Program as part of a Balanced Literacy Program

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Abstract

Scientists estimate that 95 percent of children can be taught to read. Recent studies have made it possible for us to understand how literacy develops and why some children have difficulty. The primary purpose of this literature review is to examine reading teaching models and their application in an effective reading/early intervention program. The secondary purpose is determining the characteristics of an effective early intervention program. This paper discusses the goals of an effective reading program, examines the different teaching models and the research on their effectiveness, and presents the instructional strategies and traits of an effective early intervention program.

The most fundamental responsibility of schools is teaching students to read. The future success of all students both in school and in life hinges on their ability to become proficient readers. Scientists estimate that 95 percent of children can be taught to read. However, the reality is that a high percentage is below their grade level. The prevalence of poor readers is not limited to any one segment of society. According to the American Federation of Teachers (1998), about 20 percent of elementary students have difficulty reading. At least 20 percent of the same students do not read fluently enough to enjoy independent reading. The rate of reading failure for African-American, Hispanic, limited-English speakers and poor children ranges from 60 to 70 percent. One third of poor readers are from college-educated families.

Recent scientific studies have made it possible for us to understand how literacy develops and why some children have difficulty. Reading is an acquired skill. Although some children will learn to read in spite of incidental teaching, others never learn unless they are taught in an organized, systematic, efficient way by a knowledgeable teacher (American Federation of Teachers, 1998). Students from high-risk environments come to school less prepared than their peers; yet, research shows that their risk of reading difficulties could be prevented by research-based instruction.

Some students come to school eager to learn and eager to please the teacher. Other students have little interest in learning and are not as eager to please. The teacher must accept these students regardless of their attitudes and use techniques to develop interest in learning (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997). The first step in motivating these students is demonstrating to them that they can succeed in reading. This is done by a carefully designed effective reading program that includes an effective intervention plan.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this review is to examine the research literature related to reading teaching models and their application in an effective reading/early intervention program. The secondary purpose is determining the characteristics of an effective early intervention program. Specifically, this review will answer the following questions:

1. What does the research suggest about the effectiveness of the different teaching models?
2. How does this research apply to an early intervention program?
3. For what characteristics should educators look in order to choose an effective early intervention plan?

This paper consists of three sections: the first establishes and discusses the goals of an effective reading program; the second examines the different teaching models and the research on their effectiveness; the third presents the instructional strategies and traits of an effective early intervention program.

Goals of an Effective Reading Program

In order to develop an effective reading program, goals of reading instruction must be determined. According to Stahl (1998), extensive discussions with teachers led to three basic goals:

1. Be able to read words accurately and automatically.
2. Be able to comprehend what they read and to learn from texts.
3. Appreciate good literature and be motivated to read.

These three goals can be seen as separable skills or components of reading (Stahl). An understanding of how students acquire these skills is necessary to ensure that it takes place.

Word recognition seems to go through three stages, awareness, accuracy and automaticity. In the awareness stage, children develop a conceptual knowledge of the nature of written language and its relationship to speech (Stahl, 1998). Included in these concepts are directionality, that a sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a period and the relationship between a word in speech and written language. During this stage children learn about the form of print including the letters of the alphabet and that spoken words can be broken down into phonemes. Children missing this phonological awareness tend to develop reading problems in the first grade.

In the second stage, accuracy, children learn to accurately decode words. At this point, children's emphasis is on acquiring knowledge of words and of sound-symbol correspondence and applying that knowledge strategically to unlock simple texts (Stahl, 1998). As children develop phonological awareness, they begin to use partial sound information such as initial or final sound. Efficient word recognition is dependent on more complete knowledge of sounds and symbols (Adams, 1990).

The accuracy stage is short lived and gives way to the automaticity stage. Children now begin to develop word recognition skills so that the process of recognizing words is transparent and the reader can concentrate fully on the text (Samuels, 1992). Slow word recognition interferes with comprehension. Exposure to more words of a particular pattern may hasten the development of automaticity. To move from accuracy to automaticity, children need to read as much as possible. The material should be at appropriate instructional level, traditionally defined as 95% to 99% accuracy. Rereading of these texts is necessary to improve fluency.

Once automaticity is developed comprehension becomes the primary focus. Growth in vocabulary development is the most powerful predictor of growth in comprehension (Stahl, 1998). An effective program to improve children's store of word meanings might include

reading to children, especially but not only in the early grades, reading a variety of challenging texts and direct vocabulary teaching. Although teaching vocabulary and improving general knowledge are the major routes to improving comprehension, the majority of instructional time seems to be spent on teaching skills and strategies. Readers employ skills and strategies to act on their knowledge during reading. Skills are defined as cognitive processes that are executed automatically, without the reader's conscious attention or choice. In contrast, strategies are deliberately chosen and applied to a learning situation. A strategy may become a skill as in sounding out words, which should lead to automatic recognition of words, or it may remain as a strategy such as note taking (Stahl).

Strategies for comprehension of written text include but are not limited to determining importance, summarizing, self-questioning, comprehension monitoring, context clues, generalizing and making inferences. Research suggests that teaching these strategies directly improves overall comprehension. Different instructional strategies have been employed to accomplish this. These might include reciprocal teaching, explicit explanation and cognitive apprenticeship.

The third goal of effective reading instruction is motivation. A review of research on classroom structures that promote motivation for reading by Morrow and Tracey (1998) found that certain activities are enabling in this respect. These activities may include a choice of material and experiences, learner control over the learning process, social collaboration, authentic materials, and a feeling of success.

Teaching Models of Reading

Different models of teaching have been used to facilitate achieving the goals of reading instruction. Generally speaking, these models are direct instruction, whole language and a "balanced literacy" approach.

Direct instruction is also known as the traditional model. The term direct instruction is often confusing because it refers to both a way of teaching as well as a program of instruction that evolved from the instructional model. Direct instruction in this section means a teacher-centered approach to instruction. The Direct Instruction program will be discussed later in the text.

In direct instruction, students and teacher are focused on a goal or objective, on what is to be learned; students are aware of why it is important to learn the task at hand; and students are explicitly taught how to do a particular process through teacher modeling and explanation. This is followed by guided application as students try out their interpretations of what was taught while the teacher monitors this tryout. Then independent application takes place in authentic whole materials. (Robinson, McKenna, & Wedman, 1996)

Direct instruction procedures are intended to make learning to read easier by breaking complex tasks into their components, teaching these components, and demonstrating to students how these are combined. This simplification of complex tasks is important for instructionally naïve students (Carnine, et al., 1997). A potential misuse of direct instruction is unnecessarily slowing speed of learning with instructionally sophisticated students. This situation can be avoided by pretesting all students.

Direct instruction has often been falsely equated with "skilling and drilling," in which children are taught to mindlessly apply skills in artificial situations. Of course, direct instruction can be skilling and drilling and often is. But direct instruction at its best is teaching strategies,

not skills (Robinson et al., 1996). Direct instruction involves describing to learners situations in which a strategy might be needed, modeling how to select from the alternative which strategy to use, and modeling how one thinks when using the strategy (Duffy & Roehler, 1986). The objective-based basals used the Direct Instructional Model.

Direct instruction is based on providing enough sustained, focused practice to enable learners to use strategies effectively. Sustained direct instruction has as one of its goals that learners will indeed learn from the lesson and the job is not considered completed until transfer has occurred, that is, until the students can use the strategy with new, authentic materials for authentic purposes (Robinson et al., 1996). The best-known and largest research study on the Direct Instruction Model was Project Follow Through, a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of early intervention on economically disadvantaged students in grades K through third conducted by Stanford Research Institute. The results from direct instruction indicated that students in the study performed at or above the national median in math language and spelling. Reading performance was 9 percentile points below the median. Other studies have documented the positive long-term effects of the Direct Instructional Model (Carnine et al., 1997).

Direct instruction is often criticized for stifling both student and teacher creativity. It also seems to leave something to be desired in terms of reading motivation. In response to this issue, the whole language model of reading teaching was developed.

Whole language can also be a confusing term because it is both a philosophy and a teaching approach. The advocates of whole language are known as Constructivists and often follow the theories of Piaget. Whole language is based in the belief that learning to read and write is natural to human development as long as the opportunity to learn is provided (Robinson et al., 1996). It is learner-centered. Children are exposed to a literature-rich environment where they spend their time doing reading rather than endless drilling of spelling rules and letter

combinations (Goral, 2001). Instead of learning words by breaking down their phonetic components children decode words by their context. Invented spelling is encouraged in order to enhance the writing process. Reading and writing are integrated along with listening and speaking. Whole language proponents believe it keeps reading and writing from becoming oppressive tasks, allowing children to become expressive, independent thinkers (Goral). Children are encouraged to be risk-takers, to try things out in reading and writing and to take pride in their efforts even if their products are less than perfect (Allen, 1991).

Whole language has done literacy education a great service by focusing attention on three facets of literacy: writing, children's literature, and authentic forms of assessment. Writing is increasingly viewed from the perspective of a process of communication, not as a set of mechanics to be mastered and then applied (Robinson et al., 1996). Classrooms have been flooded with trade books, used for both instruction and recreational reading. In place of standardized testing, authentic assessment focuses on developing literacy process over product. Portfolios, conference records and anecdotal information allow teacher, child, and parents to view the child's progress in terms of self (Robinson).

However, whole language's lack of definite structure underlies its biggest problem. Research shows that children in language-experience classes spent less time reading and more time discussing than in traditional reading classes. Stahl, Suttles, & Pagnucco (1996) found that leaving children to choose books might mean that children will choose books that are too easy to provide the challenge they need for growth.

Stanovich and Stanovich (1995) through their research have found that "some children in whole language classrooms do not pick up the alphabetic principle through simple immersion in print and writing activities, and need explicit instruction in spelling- sound principles." The lack of skills instruction especially phonics has been the greatest criticism of whole language.

Research suggests that the organized exposure through a phonics program leads to more efficient word recognition than the unsystematic exposure found in many whole language classes (Chall, 1996b). This is especially true for culturally diverse children.

Harris and Graham (1996), both experienced reading teachers, were pleased with their daughter's school and their "whole language/ progressive" educational approach. However, by the end of kindergarten, their daughter was not making much progress in reading. An assessment determined that she lacked word attack skills. During the summer they taught her to read using "direct, explicit, intensive and often isolated" activities for word attack. Students who have not learned word attack skills can often be successful through third grade by memorization. However, they may begin to encounter difficulty in fourth grade when more and complex words are introduced.

Whole language programs do appear to improve student motivation. Stahl et al (1996), while observing some first grade classes found that children in the whole language classes had little idea about who the best readers were in their class. Both good and struggling readers believed that they were good readers. Aside from an increase in motivation to read, there is no direct evidence of the benefits of whole language. Parents and educators have voiced concerns about the number of children who have not learned to read "naturally" by the 1st or 2nd grades, whose handwriting is illegible and labored in the upper elementary grades, and whole spelling remains "inventive" long past the early grades (Smith 1994). Students in special education began scoring higher on standardized tests than regular education.

As Harris and Graham (1996) found out with their daughter, an integrated balanced approach is necessary. "We strongly support integrated constructivist curriculums and authentic learning environments. For more than a decade, we have worked with local schools to advance the process approach to writing for all students, but we firmly believe that we must provide

explicit, focused, and at times, isolated instruction to the extent needed—and integrate it into the larger literacy content."

The Balanced Literacy Model is a synthesis of Direct Instruction and Whole Language. It is eclectic; that is, putting together the best of both. However, Direct Instruction and Whole Language seem diametrically opposed with strong advocates seeing them as incompatible. Whole Language proponents use certain catch phrases to describe whole language and other phrases to describe those who oppose it. Whole language is "natural", "authentic", Child centered" and empowering. The built in implications being that what is not whole language is artificial, inauthentic, anti-children and disempowering (Stahl, 1998). Nonetheless, Deegan (1995) states " the reality of the world of schooling is that teachers will draw what works best for them from both worlds. According to Wyse (2000), a strong consensus has emerged that recognizes that interactive reading models which combine both "top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches are beneficial. Walmsley and Adams (1993) have found that " most whole language teachers seem to have adopted the practices they find useful and to have mixed them with more traditional techniques. The same results were found in a study by Baumann, 1998) where the conclusion from exploring 1200 classroom teachers was that " a majority of teachers embraced a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices.

According to Harris and Graham (1996), in successful integrated instruction, teachers conduct ongoing assessments of each student's abilities, skills, knowledge, motivation, social characteristics, and prior experiences. They then arrange whatever support children need—from direct explanation through discovery.

Stahl (1998) suggests that in order to effectively meet the varied goals of a reading program at different stages that different types of programs be used at different grade levels. In

kindergarten, a whole language classroom with the exception of direct instruction of phonemic awareness can meet the goals of effective reading instruction.

First grade is where the integration is most crucial. Children need systematic and direct instruction of decoding with practice in decodable texts. Authentic literature can be used for repetition of taught patterns. Children need a variety of interesting but easy texts, which might be predictable, where the context supports word recognition, at least until the child develops mire independent word recognition strategies (Clay, 1993). Writing using invented spelling would be uses for developing word knowledge allowing children to integrate their developing phoneme awareness with their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences (Stahl & Murray, 1998). Because first graders are focused on decoding, the teacher's reading aloud to the children might best accommodate their comprehension growth (Chall, 1996). Basic comprehension strategies such as recall can be successfully taught to students of this age. To improve motivation, a program should include a daily period of choice reading (Morrow & Tracey, 1998).

In second grade, the goals for decoding shift to a greater emphasis on fluency. Children need to increase the volume of text read and may need to read the same text repeatedly to develop automaticity. The goals for comprehension and motivation remain the same with increased exposure to more complex vocabulary and story structures.

By the end of third grade, decoding ceases to be an issue for most children and instructional attention can shift to comprehension and motivation. Direct instruction of comprehension strategies should be embedded within whole language classes. Teachers should continue to read aloud to children and also should include daily vocabulary instruction. The use of open-ended tasks such as written responses to text is appropriate in upper level classes.

Both direct instruction and whole language fall short of meeting the goals of an effective reading program individually. Eclecticism or a balanced literacy model seems to be the answer.

Stahl (1996) suggests that, rather than approaching reading through a consistent philosophical stance, an effective teacher of reading has to understand how reading develops, in all of its manifestations. This involves a deeper understanding of the development of automatic word recognition, comprehension, and motivation and appreciation together with a skill in weaving these various goals into a coherent program.

The Intervention Model

Children enter kindergarten at different levels of prereading or reading competence. This may be the result of preschool experience, the amount of time read to by parents or socioeconomic conditions. Mason (1992) suggests, " Ability and achievement are closely linked to intellectual stimulation at home and to the sociopsychological environment. Brooks, Pugh, and Schagen (1996) suggest that the "long tail of underachievement' can be clearly linked with those children who receive free school meals.

Students that enter school academically behind are considered to be "at-risk". School failure for at-risk children results largely from the fact that all children are expected to learn a specified battery of skills in so many years. This race is unfair for at-risk children because they have further to go in the specified time (Engelmann, 1999).

They enter first grade substantially behind in prereading, language and number skills. To finish the first grade performing on grade level, they would have to learn substantially more that the advantaged child must learn (Hart & Risley, 1995). At-risk children are not well equipped to meet this challenge. They are less familiar with the content and less practiced at learning from adults. They therefore learn more slowly (Engelmann, 1999). At-risk children in 4th grade often have not mastered the skills they were scheduled to learn in first grade. According to last years National Assessment of Education Progress from the U.S. Dept. of Ed., 38 % of US 4th graders could not read at a basic level (Bigham, 2000).

The academic difficulties experienced by many minority children are traceable to adjustment problems and patterns of underachievement that begin in the first few years of formal schooling (Belsky & MaacKinnon, 1994). The child who get off to a slow beginning in the early school years carries a record of failure; and because of the cumulative nature of the topics of early curriculum, a disadvantaged learner may be hindered by gaps in understanding that may be difficult to overcome (Belsky & MacKinnon). A large body of literature suggests that delinquency is highly correlated with school failure, particularly the failure to learn to read (Hodgkson, 1992). For the school and the community, failure is costly, requiring special programs, welfare, and detention services.

Regardless of the reason why a child is at-risk, it is the school's responsibility to counter the problem. Traditional approaches, such as tracking and grade retention, do not help; they often appear to be detrimental to eventual student achievement (Shepard & Smith, 1993). A growing body of evidence suggests that reading problems are preventable for the vast majority of students who encounter difficulty in learning to read if these students receive extra support in the form of an early intervention program (Goldenberg, 1994). Early Intervention refers to early school intervention programs that are designed to prevent problems in literacy from developing rather than trying to correct a problem after it is established (Pikulski, 1994).

Language knowledge and language proficiency differentiate good and poor readers. As they begin to learn, poor readers are not less intelligent or less motivated; they are, however, less skilled with language, especially at the level of elemental linguistic units smaller than whole words (Moats, 1999). For this reason, disadvantaged students must receive instruction that develops awareness of sounds, syllables, meaningful word parts, relationships among word meanings, and the structures of written text. They also must be "taught at a faster rate to succeed and compete with advantaged peers (Carmine et al., 1997).

The ideal goal is to accelerate at-risk children so that they leave kindergarten academically ahead of affluent children - operating at around the 2nd grade level (Engelmann, 1999). Kindergarten is the reasonable window to accomplish this acceleration because waiting until after kindergarten puts the disadvantaged student that much farther behind their peers who know more and are equipped to learn faster. At-risk children who are ahead after kindergarten will tend to remain competitive (Hart & Risley, 1995). The two-year jump is necessary in order to compensate for the lack of potential help from home in later years.

To facilitate the acceleration, the intervention program must be supplementary to a well-designed classroom program. Studies show that the best instruction approach for intervention is using direct instruction. In the previously mentioned Project Follow-Through, educational reformers were searching for programs to produce superior outcomes for at-risk children. They looked at nine different instructional approaches and found the direct instructional model to yield the best results. The models based on a self-directed learner model were at the bottom of academic and affective achievement (Aft, 1977). Based on a research literature review of effective reading strategies, Shepley (1996) found direct instruction, metacognition, and visualization and repeated reading the most effective strategies. Another literature review by McCormick and Becker (1996) furnished the same evidence especially the use of direct instruction for vocabulary improvement. Wrobel (1996) studied the effects of direct instruction on the basic reading skills of 3rd grade students from a low socioeconomic background and saw significant gains.

The Direct Instruction Program that evolved from the direct instruction teaching model was designed by Siegfried Engelmann for Project Follow Through. The first series, DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching and Remediation), was in reading and math for K-3

children, particularly at-risk and low achievers. In its second phase the program was expanded to include language arts and grade K –6.

The Direct Instruction Program is an intensive instructional method based on the theory that learning can be greatly accelerated if certain instruction presentations are clear and facilitate generalizations (Northwest Regional Laboratory, 1998). The developers of the Program believe certain basic skills and knowledge must be learned and mastered, especially if students are to advance to higher-order thinking skills. Direct instruction aims not only to increase the amount of learning, but also its quality by systematically developing important background knowledge and applying and linking it to new knowledge (Block, Everson, & Guskey, 1995). While the focus is on academic achievement, Direct Instruction also seeks to improve students' social behavior and emotional well being by helping them succeed in their core content work (Education Commission of the States, 1999).

The key components of the Direct Instruction Program include a mastery and application of basic skills. Curricula are based on a sequence of skills and knowledge built on the previous set. Frequent assessment is necessary to ensure mastery and detect individual weaknesses. Rapid-paced teacher directed instruction to small groups follows scripted lesson plans. Ongoing in-service and preservice training for staff, including paraprofessionals, is available. High expectations are set for all students.

Over 50 instructional programs have been developed based on the Direct Instruction Program. The most widely recognized Direct Instruction Program is Reading Mastery distributed by SRA. The program uses an explicit phonics approach and emphasizes student's ability to apply thinking skills in order to comprehend what they read. Another part of the Reading Mastery Program is Corrective Reading, designed for students in grade 4 – 12 who are two or more grade levels below grade placement.

Another well-known program, which is a spin off of DI, is Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is an early intervention program designed by Marie Clay to assist children in first grade that are having difficulty reading. It provides one-to-one tutoring, five days per week, 30 minutes per day, by a specially trained teacher. It continues until children can read at or above the class average, lasting an average of 12 – 20 weeks. Any student not successful at this point should be referred to the Child Study Team. Early Success by Houghton-Mifflin is based on Reading Recovery.

With the number of programs currently available or becoming available, educators and administrators need criteria to identify the best fit for them. The American Federation of Teachers (1999) suggests that the program should show evidence of:

1. High Standards – The program helps all students acquire the skills and/or knowledge they need to successfully perform to high academic standards.
2. Effectiveness – The program has proven to be effective in raising the academic achievement of "at risk" students in low-performing schools, based on *independent evaluations.*
3. Replicability – The program has been effectively implemented in multiple sites beyond the original pilot school(s).
4. Support Structures – Professional development, materials, and ongoing implementation support are available for the program, either through the program's developer, independent contactors, or dissemination networks established in schools already in the program.

Pikulski (1994), after a review of the literature of programs that have documented effectiveness, came up with factors that are common to successful early intervention programs. All programs are predicated on a strong, effective regular classroom program to which the

intervention is supplementary. Reading for meaning is an overriding concern. Substantial help is provided in building word identification skills, keeping discussion and questioning to a minimum.

Intervention instruction is frequent, regular and has sufficient duration to make a difference. Special instruction is on a daily basis for periods ranging from 20 to 45 minutes. Daily contact with students ensures that progress is steady and allows teachers to become familiar with students and their strengths and needs. Pupil to teacher ratio is kept very small. The group size depends on need and should never exceed seven. One on one instruction is the most powerful and may be necessary for children with very serious problems. The instruction pace is fast. This is necessary to accelerate the learning.

Fluency is a major goal. The methods and materials of a program must help students to recognize words accurately and rapidly, and to group words into meaningful phrases. There is clear evidence that unless students become fluent in their abilities to identify words, they will have difficulty concentrating their attention on comprehending and responding to the texts they read (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). To build fluency, reread a book several times is encouraged. There is evidence that rereading texts improves word identification, comprehension and builds confidence in reading competency.

Word learning activities are used to help children become very familiar with print. Instructional procedures are used to introduce new books in order to insure that students are successful in reading them. Some of these procedures are picture walking, new vocabulary introduction, shared reading and choral reading. Texts are carefully selected and sequenced to ensure student success. The most frequently used texts in early intervention are predictable texts. These books tend to have a close match between pictures and text, recurring language patterns,

repetition of language elements and short in duration. The texts are designed so that the students can apply the skills and strategies they are learning.

Writing is used to teach and extend word identification skills. It serves a different purpose that writing in the regular classroom. The student still needs regular classroom instruction for organizing and communicating ideas and process writing.

The program is scripted with a well-defined sequence. Children come to know quickly what will be happening and the order in which it happens. Time is not lost in transitions or in deciding on activities. Assessment is meaningful, practical, efficient and ongoing. Running records, miscue analysis and oral reading checks are examples of the types of assessment.

Parent involvement is encouraged. Parents are informed about the program, given regular updates and told ways they can help. Only materials that students can successfully read are sent home.

Teacher training is practical and ongoing. Preservice training is necessary before implementing the program. Then, teachers need to have access to and opportunities to consult with teachers experience in the program over at lest the first year of implementation. There is some evidence that instructional assistants can effectively teach in early intervention programs if they receive the appropriate professional developmental experiences. (Slavin, 1994).

The final consideration for an early intervention program is cost-effectiveness. The school district should explore both the short and long term implications of the program. While the initial cost for materials, training and staffing can be expensive; the long-term pay off in reducing special education expenses is often worthwhile. According to Slavin (1994), Success for All, his direct instruction early intervention program, has actually reduced special education populations more than 25 percent in schools.

Summary and Implications

Most teachers agree that the goals for an effective literacy program are word recognition, comprehension and motivation. The purpose of reading is to comprehend, but word recognition is paramount to comprehension. A child cannot understand what he cannot decode, but what he decodes is meaningless unless he can understand it (Moats, 1999). Extensive studies now help us understand how children learn to read. Word recognition skills are developed in stages. Knowledge of sound-symbol relationships is crucial in developing word recognition. Good readers process the letters of each word in detail, although they do so very rapidly and unconsciously. When word identification is fast and accurate, a reader has ample mental energy to think over the meaning of the text (Moats). Students are motivated to read when it is easy for them to do so.

Extensive research has also looked at teaching models to determine the most effective way to achieve true literacy. Although there are different names given to different programs, they all fall under one of three teaching models: teacher-centered instruction, student-centered instruction and eclectic instruction. Teacher-centered instruction, also known as direct instruction, has proven to be effective in teaching the necessary skills to become a successful reader. This is especially true for early intervention programs. It is a very organized and systematic approach to learning. However, it has left something to be desired in terms of creativity and motivation both on the teacher and students' part. On the other hand, the student-centered approach, also known as the whole language approach, has done a great deal for motivation and creativity but has left many students without the necessary skills to attain literacy.

Since neither of the first two approaches adequately accomplishes the goals of a literacy program and actually seems complementary to each other, the obvious answer is to adopt an

eclectic approach. The American Federation of Teachers (1998) extensively studied effective reading instruction and wholehearted supports this approach. Cooper (2000) argues for a balanced literacy approach – for a balance between the affective dimension, including motivation, and the cognitive dimension in the teaching of literacy. He emphasizes a balance between time spent teaching reading and time spent teaching writing as well as opportunities to integrate the two. He stresses the importance of teacher-led instruction and modeling while pointing out that the teacher's support must gradually be withdrawn to lead students to independence. He emphasizes teaching skills and strategies, such as word identification, spelling, vocabulary and grammar, in the larger context of purposeful reading and writing. He argues for the value both of responding to literature and of reading for information. Stahl (1998) also supports the balanced literacy program but contends that the balance should change depending on the grade level. Many teachers, doing what good teachers do, have integrated direct instruction with whole language in their classrooms on their own. However, this approach needs to be addressed as part of the curriculum for teacher preparation and included in in-service professional development.

The final piece in organizing a balanced literacy program is intervention. Intervention is additional instruction (usually in reading) that prevents or stops failure. Research has clearly demonstrated that some students will never achieve complete success in reading without additional instructional support that is given in addition to the balanced classroom program that everyone receives (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998). These at-risk students must be accelerated in their learning in order to allow them to compete with their more successful peers. A successful intervention program will accomplish this. There are many well-documented programs available. The characteristics of an effective intervention program are high standards,

effectiveness, reliability, and have support structures in place. Regardless of the program, the intervention plan is a critical part of the balanced literacy program.

Recommendations

Research tells us that 95% of all students are capable of reading and the inability to read is the underlying cause for school and life failure. Research also tells us that an integrated, balanced approach is the most effective teaching model. Because classroom instruction, more than any other factor, is crucial in preventing reading problems, it is the primary focus for effecting change. The knowledge and skills inherent in effective reading programs must be part of every teacher's reading instruction repertoire. Good research-based teacher preparation programs, coupled with high-quality professional development for classroom teachers, can assure this (Moats, 1999). Ensuring that an effective intervention program is part of that effective reading program will make that 95% statistic achievable for all school districts, regardless of the socioeconomic background.

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